India's Legacy in UN Peacekeeping: Leadership, Commitment, and Sacrifice

"At the heart of our foreign policy lies a commitment to peacekeeping—rooted in dialogue, diplomacy, and cooperation. Guided by the philosophy of ***"Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam,"*** *the belief that the world is one family, India will continue to contribute meaningfully to the cause of UN peacekeeping[1]."*

- Dr S. Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister of India

Introduction

The **United Nations (UN)** was founded in **1945** with the primary goal of maintaining international peace and security. Since its inception, **UN peacekeeping** has become a valuable tool to help countries navigate the challenging path from conflict to peace. India has been a key contributor to global peace and security, with over **2,90,000 peacekeepers serving** in more than **50 UN missions**. Currently, over **5,000 Indian peacekeepers** are deployed in **9 active missions**, working in challenging conditions to promote international peace.

The UN Peacekeepers, known as **Blue Helmets**, get their name from the light blue of the United Nations flag. In 1947, the UN decided on this colour because **blue symbolizes peace**, while **red is often linked to war**. This light blue shade has since become a symbol of the UN.

In **2023**, India received the **UN's highest peacekeeping honour**, the **Dag Hammarskjöld Medal**, posthumously awarded to Indian peacekeepers Shishupal Singh and Sanwala Ram Vishnoi and civilian UN worker Shaber Taher Ali for their sacrifice in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

From 24th-25th February 2025, **the Centre of United Nations Peacekeeping (CUNPK)** hosted the **'Conference on Women Peacekeepers from the Global South'** at the Manekshaw Centre in New Delhi. This two-day event brought together women peacekeepers from **35 nations** to discuss the evolving role of women in peacekeeping operations and strategies to enhance their participation. The conference underscored India's commitment to gender equality and its leadership in promoting inclusive and effective peacekeeping operations.

[1] MEA S Jaishankar Speech

What is UN Peacekeeping

UN Peacekeeping is a key mechanism used by the United Nations to **maintain global peace and security**. It operates alongside other UN efforts, including conflict prevention, peacemaking, peace enforcement, and peacebuilding.

What It Involves

UN peacekeeping missions are deployed to support ceasefires and peace agreements. However, modern peacekeeping has evolved into a multidimensional effort that goes beyond military presence. It involves:

- **Facilitating Political Processes:** Supporting negotiations and governance structures.
- **Protecting Civilians:** Ensuring the safety of vulnerable populations in conflict zones.
- **Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR):** Assisting former combatants in transitioning to civilian life.
- **Election Support:** Helping organize and oversee free and fair elections.
- **Human Rights and Rule of Law:** Promoting justice, accountability, and governance reforms.

Role of Peacekeeping

Peacekeeping today often overlaps with **peacemaking** and **peacebuilding,** requiring flexibility in addressing conflicts. While primarily deployed to **maintain peace**, peacekeepers may also take on active roles **in conflict resolution and early recovery efforts**. In some cases, they are authorized to **use force to protect civilians, enforce mandates, and maintain security** where the host state is unable to do so.

History of UN Peacekeeping

UN Peacekeeping began in **1948** with the establishment of the **United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO)** in the **Middle East** to monitor ceasefires. Initially, peacekeeping missions were unarmed and focused on observation and mediation. During the **Cold War**, missions remained limited due to geopolitical tensions, but the end of the Cold War in the **1990s** saw a significant expansion in both the number and scope of peacekeeping operations. The UN began deploying **multidimensional missions** that combined **military, political, and humanitarian efforts, addressing civil conflicts, supporting governance, and protecting human rights.**

[2] **Military observers serving with the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) on Suez Canal in 1967**

Over time, peacekeeping evolved to include complex tasks such as **nation-building, electoral assistance, and countering violent extremism**. Challenges like mission failures in Rwanda and Bosnia prompted reforms, leading to the **Brahimi Report (2000)**, which emphasized robust mandates and better resources. The **Responsibility to Protect (R2P)** doctrine further shaped interventions, while modern missions increasingly focus on **civilian protection, gender inclusion, and regional partnerships**. Today, UN Peacekeeping continues to adapt, balancing traditional roles with emerging global security threats.

India's Contribution to UN Peacekeeping

India has a long and distinguished history of serving in UN peacekeeping, dating back to its participation in the UN operation in Korea in the 1953. India's commitment to non-violence, enshrined in its philosophy and championed by **Mahatma Gandhi,** aligns with the **UN's approach to promoting global peace**. This commitment stems from India's ancient principle of ***"Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam"*** **(the whole world is my family)**, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of humanity and the importance of peaceful coexistence.

Since the **1950s**, India has sent over **290,000 peacekeepers** to more than **50 missions worldwide**, making it the largest contributor to UN peacekeeping efforts. Today, over **5,000 Indian troops** serve in **nine** of the **eleven** active missions, often in dangerous and hostile regions, dedicated to upholding global peace and security. In this noble pursuit, nearly **180 Indian peacekeepers** have made the ultimate sacrifice—heroes whose bravery and commitment will always be remembered.

[2] https://www.un.org/en/exhibits/exhibit/75-years-un-peacekeeping

The **nine UN peacekeeping missions** where the **Indian Armed Forces were involved as of May 29, 2024**:[3]

Mission Name	Location	India's Contribution
UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF)	Golan Heights	Logistics Battalion with 188 personnel for logistics security
UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)	Lebanon	Infantry battalion group with 762 personnel and 18 staff officers
UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO)	Middle East	Military observers and support staff
UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP)	Cyprus	Deployment of officers as staff and military observers
UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO)	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Infantry battalions, medical units, and support staff
UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)	South Sudan	Infantry battalion, medical personnel, and engineering units
UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNIFSA)	Abyei	Military observers and staff officers
UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA)	Central African Republic	Formed Police Units (FPUs) and military observers
UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO)	Western Sahara	Deployment of military observers

[3] https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2022052#:~:text=Presently%2C%20Indian%20Armed%20Forces%20are,%2C%20UNIFSA%2C%20MINUSCA%20and%20MINURSO.

[4] **Paratroopers from India and the U.S. on the way to Korea, in 1953**

India is dedicated to helping **Global South nations** strengthen their peacekeeping capabilities. Through the **Centre for UN Peacekeeping**, India continues to provide training and capacity-building programs, including specialized courses for women peacekeepers, as carried out for ASEAN nations in 2023. Peacekeeping is at the core of India's foreign policy—driven by dialogue, diplomacy, and global cooperation. This commitment reflects India's belief in the importance of South-South cooperation and its role as a leader in promoting peace and security in the developing world. Indian peacekeepers have served in diverse and challenging environments, making significant contributions to peace and security in various regions.

The following table summarizes some of the key UN peacekeeping missions where India has been involved:[5] [6]

Mission Name	Location	Year	India's Contribution
UN Assistance Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA)	Central African Republic	**2014-Present**	Formed Police Units (FPUs) and military observers
UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)	South Sudan	**2012-Present**	Infantry battalion, medical personnel, and engineering units

[4] https://www.mea.gov.in/photo-features.htm?842/Indias+contribution+to+UN
[5] https://www.pminewyork.gov.in/pdf/menu/submenu__668040979.pdf , p.04-05
[6] https://pminewyork.gov.in/pdf/menu/submenu__1260383365.pdf, p. 07-09

Mission Name	Location	Year	India's Contribution
UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO)	DR Congo	**2010-Present**	Infantry battalions, medical units, and support staff
UN Mission in the Golan Heights (UNDOF)	Golan Heights	**2006-Present**	Logistics Battalion with 188 personnel for logistics security
UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS/UNMISS)	Sudan/South Sudan	**2005-Present**	Battalion groups, engineer company, Signal Company, hospitals, military observers (MILOBs) and staff officers (SOs)
UN Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC/MONUSCO)	DR Congo	**2005-Present**	Infantry Brigade Group (three battalions, including RDB), hospital, MILOBs, SOs, and two FPUs
UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)	Lebanon	**1998-Present**	Infantry battalion group with 762 personnel and 18 staff officers
UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)	Liberia	**2007-16**	Deployed both male and female FPUs
UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE)	Ethiopia-Eritrea	**2006-08**	Contributed an infantry battalion group, an engineer company, and a force reserve company
UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH)	Haiti	**2004-17**	Contributed Formed Police Units (FPUs) from various police forces
UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL)	Sierra Leone	**1999-2001**	Deployed infantry battalions, engineer companies, and other support elements
UN Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM)	Angola	**1989-99**	Provided military observers and staff officers
UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR)	Rwanda	**1994-96**	Contributed medical personnel and logistical support
UN Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM II)	Somalia	**1993-94**	Deployed an Army Brigade Group and four Navy battleships

Mission Name	Location	Year	India's Contribution
UN Operation in the Congo (ONUC)	Congo	**1960-64**	Deployed two brigades to counter secession and re-integrate the country
UN Emergency Force (UNEF I)	Middle East	**1956-67**	Contributed to an infantry battalion and other support elements
Control of Indo-China	Indo-China (Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos)	**1954-70**	Provided an infantry battalion and supporting staff for monitoring ceasefire and repatriation of prisoners of war
UN Operation in Korea	Korea	**1950-54**	Provided medical cover to UN forces, chaired the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission

India has deployed Staff Officers, Experts on Mission, Military Observers, and Independent Police Officers in key UN peacekeeping missions, including **United Nations Operation in Cote d'lvoire (UNOCI), United Nations Association Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), United Nations Peacekeeping Force In Cyprus (FICYP), United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO),** and **United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA)**. These deployments reflect India's unwavering commitment to global peace and stability.

India has been a leader in strengthening UN, host nations, and partner nations through capacity-building efforts. Committed to supporting UN initiatives, India has provided highly **adaptable peacekeeping units, advanced training, logistical support, and technological upgrades while promoting gender parity** in peacekeeping forces. Beyond deployments, India actively helps host nations by **offering training, infrastructure development, and Civil-Military Coordination (CIMIC) programs**. Notably, **Indian Army Veterinary Detachments** have significantly impacted various UN missions, showcasing India's dedication to humanitarian and peacekeeping efforts worldwide.

To ensure the efficiency and sustainability of Indian contingents in UN missions, the Indian Army has deployed state-of-the-art, indigenously manufactured equipment and vehicles. Built-in India, these advanced systems have proven their resilience in the toughest terrains, harshest climates, and most challenging operational conditions, reinforcing India's commitment to global peacekeeping.

Women in Peacekeeping

Women play a crucial role in conflict resolution, community engagement, and peacebuilding, often gaining better access to local populations, particularly women and children. Their presence also helps **prevent sexual violence**, builds trust within communities, and fosters more inclusive and sustainable peace processes. Yet, despite these advantages, their participation in peacekeeping missions remains disproportionately low.

Despite global efforts, women still make up **less than 10% of the UN's 70,000 uniformed peacekeepers**—including **military personnel, police officers, and observers**. Recognizing the need for greater gender inclusivity, the UN has set ambitious targets under its **Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy**, aiming for **15% women in military contingents and 25% in police units by 2028**.

The push for greater female representation began in **2000 with UN Security Council Resolution 1325**, which formally recognized women's critical role in conflict prevention, peace negotiations, and post-conflict rebuilding. This was followed by a series of **Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Resolutions**—including **1820, 1888, 1889, 2122, and 2242**—that reinforced the need for women's leadership in peace efforts and took a strong stance against conflict-related sexual violence.

In **2022**, women made up **7.9%** of all uniformed personnel in field missions - up from just **1%** in **1993**. This included **5.9%** in military contingents, **14.4%** in police forces, and **43%** in justice and corrections roles. Among civilian personnel, **30%** were women, with a growing number in leadership positions, achieving gender parity among Heads and Deputy Heads of Missions.

Why Women Peacekeepers Matter?

Stronger Peacekeeping: Diverse and inclusive teams lead to more effective peace operations, improving civilian protection and peacebuilding.

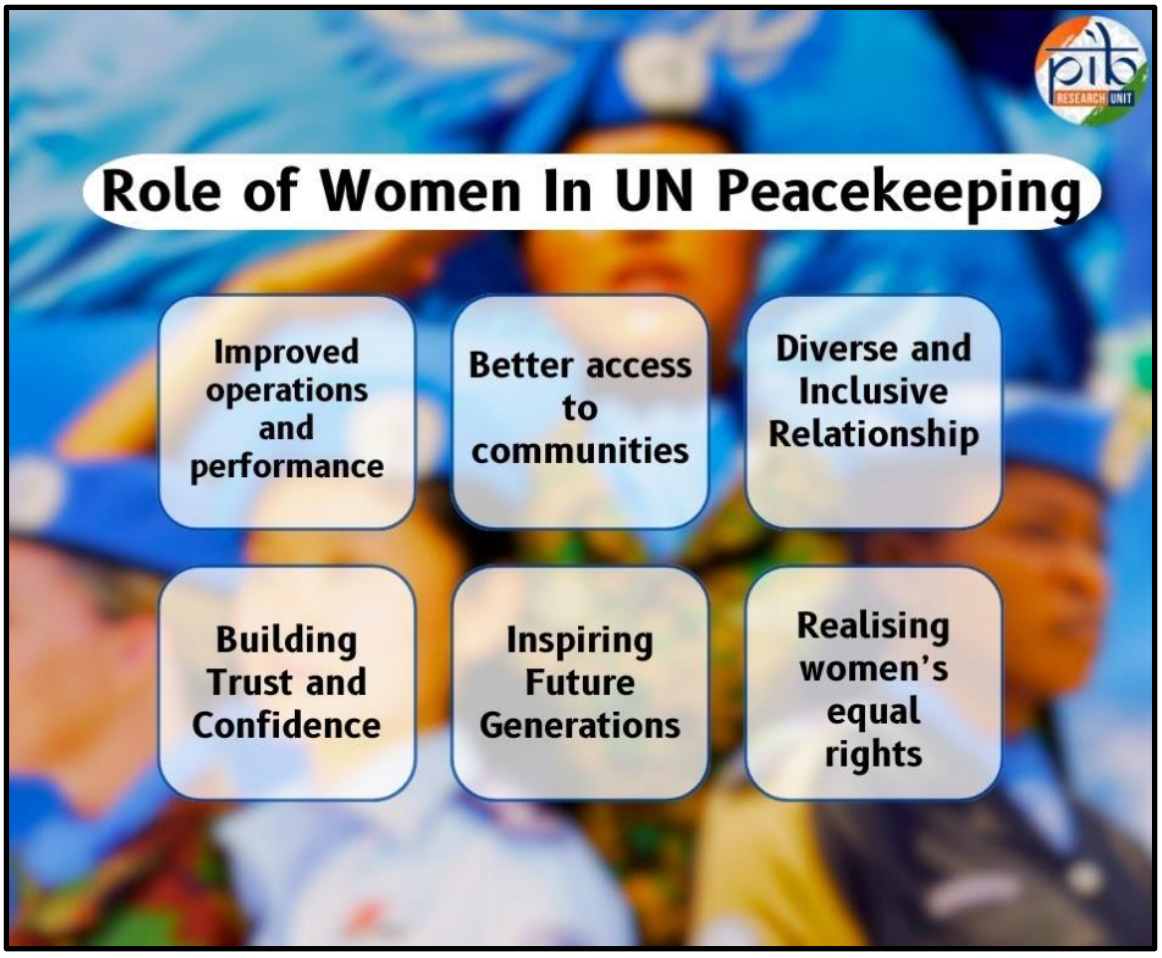
Better Access & Trust: Women peacekeepers enhance engagement with local communities, especially women, building trust and expanding outreach.

Diverse Leadership & Decision-Making: Gender-balanced teams bring broader perspectives, strengthening decision-making and ensuring operations reflect the communities they serve.

Role Models for Change: Women peacekeepers inspire future generations, challenging traditional norms and empowering women and girls to advocate for their rights.

Advancing Gender Equality: Upholding equality and non-discrimination is central to UN Peacekeeping, aligning with the core principles of the UN Charter.

While progress has been made, achieving true gender balance requires stronger commitments from countries worldwide. As the UN continues to push for change, increasing women's presence in peacekeeping is not just about numbers—it's about creating more effective, inclusive, and lasting peace.


Role of Women In UN Peacekeeping
Improved operations and performance
Better access to communities
Diverse and Inclusive Relationship
Building Trust and Confidence
Inspiring Future Generations
Realising women's equal rights

Indian Women in UN Peacekeeping : Breaking Barriers, Building Peace

India has been a strong advocate for women's participation in UN peacekeeping, recognizing their vital role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. From military and police to civilian roles, Indian women peacekeepers are on the front lines, engaging with local communities, protecting vulnerable groups, and fostering dialogue.

Countries of the Global South are the backbone of UN peacekeeping, with **India leading the way** as the **largest troop-contributing nation**. India has a proud history of deploying women in both military and police roles. This legacy began in the **1960s**, when Indian women medical officers were sent to the **Congo**, marking the country's pioneering role in female peacekeeping.

India has been a trailblazer in integrating women into UN peacekeeping operations, setting benchmarks for others to follow. **In 2007,** India deployed the **first-ever all-female Formed Police Unit (FPU) to Liberia**, a move that not only enhanced local security but also empowered Liberian women to participate more actively in their nation's security sectors. This pioneering initiative increased women's participation in security sectors over the years.

As of **February 2025**, India continues this legacy with over **150 women peacekeepers** serving across **six critical missions**, including those in **the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Lebanon, Golan Heights, Western Sahara, and Abyei**. These deployments underscore India's commitment to gender parity and the vital role women play in global peace and security.

Major Radhika Sen has been named the ***"Military Gender Advocate of the Year 2023"*** by the UN Headquarters, recognizing the significant contributions of Indian women to UN peacekeeping efforts.

Despite their contributions, Indian women peacekeepers face challenges, from **deep-rooted gender biases and security risks to logistical barriers**. Overcoming these obstacles requires resilience, strong support systems, and policies that ensure their safety and effectiveness. Yet, their impact is undeniable. By **breaking stereotypes and empowering women and girls in conflict zones**, Indian women peacekeepers **build trust, address gender-based violence, and inspire change**. Their presence is not just **symbolic—it is transformative**, shaping a more inclusive and effective approach to global peacekeeping.

[7]

Indian women peacekeepers have become exemplars on the international stage, inspiring others through their dedication and professionalism. Their contributions have not only bolstered the effectiveness of peacekeeping missions but have also paved the way for greater inclusion of women in peace processes worldwide.

Training and Capacity Building

India's Centre for **United Nations Peacekeeping (CUNPK),** established by the **Indian Army in New Delhi**, serves as the nation's focal point for UN peacekeeping training. Annually, it trains over **12,000 troops**, offering a range of programs from contingent training to specialized national and international courses for prospective peacekeepers and trainers. Additionally, CUNPK dispatches **Mobile Training Teams** to friendly foreign countries to bolster UN peacekeeping training capacities.

Recognized as a **Centre of Excellence**, CUNPK has evolved into a repository of experience and best practices over the past two decades. It also plays a pivotal role in international cooperation, hosting foreign delegations to share best practices and conducting joint training initiatives. For instance, in 2016, CUNPK launched the inaugural **United Nations Peacekeeping Course for African Partners (UNPCAP-01)**, a three-week

[7] United Nations In India

program conducted in collaboration with the USA, aimed at enhancing peacekeeping capacities among African nations.

In **February 2025**, CUNPK hosted the **'Conference on Women Peacekeepers from the Global South'** at the **Manekshaw Centre** in New Delhi. This two-day event brought together women peacekeepers from **35 nations** to discuss the evolving role of women in peacekeeping operations and strategies to enhance their participation. The conference underscored India's commitment to gender equality and its leadership in promoting inclusive and effective peacekeeping operations.

[8]'Conference on Women Peacekeepers from the Global South' at the Manekshaw Centre

Through these initiatives, CUNPK significantly contributes to global peacekeeping efforts by enhancing training and capacity-building, fostering international collaboration, and promoting gender inclusivity in peacekeeping missions.

Conclusion

India's role in UN peacekeeping reflects its deep commitment to global peace, security, and multilateralism. From its early involvement in the Korean War to its ongoing deployments in conflict zones worldwide, India has consistently upheld the principles of the UN Charter. As one of the largest troop-contributing nations, India's contributions go beyond numbers—it provides critical services, leadership, and a strong commitment to gender parity in peacekeeping. Rooted in its foreign policy and cultural values, India's approach to peacekeeping is guided by its belief in non-violence, dialogue, and cooperation. Indian peacekeepers have served with distinction, from the battlefields of Korea to the shores of Liberia, earning global respect for their

[8] https://x.com/DefProdnIndia/status/1894062079566614714/photo/1

professionalism, courage, and dedication. However, peacekeeping is not without challenges. Indian troops operate in volatile environments, risking their lives to protect civilians and uphold peace. The sacrifices of nearly 180 fallen Indian peacekeepers stand as a testament to this profound commitment.

Beyond deployments, India actively strengthens UN missions through training, capacity-building, and technological support. As a pioneer in deploying women peacekeepers, India champions a more inclusive and effective approach to conflict resolution. By fostering cooperation and empowering communities, India continues to illuminate the path toward a more peaceful and secure world, inspiring the global community with its unwavering dedication.

References

- MEA S Jaishankar Speech
- https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/peace-and-security
- https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/what-is-peacekeeping
- https://indembassy-amman.gov.in/pdf/25012024_India%20and%20UN_%20India's%20Contribution%20to%20UNPK%20Missions.doc.pdf
- https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/terminology
- https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/our-history
- https://www.un.org/en/exhibits/exhibit/75-years-un-peacekeeping
- https://gallantryawards.gov.in/assets/wars/1.pdf
- https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/39099/EAMs_remarks_during_the_Inaugural_session_of_the_Conference_for_Women_Peacekeepers_from_the_Global_South__Women_in_Peacekeeping__A_Global_South_Perspe
- https://www.mea.gov.in/photo-features.htm?842/Indias+contribution+to+UN
- https://www.pminewyork.gov.in/pdf/menu/submenu__668040979.pdf
- https://pminewyork.gov.in/pdf/menu/submenu__1260383365.pdf
- https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2022052
- United Nations In India
- https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/women-peacekeeping
- https://indembassy-amman.gov.in/pdf/25012024_India%20and%20UN_%20India's%20Contribution%20to%20UNPK%20Missions.doc.pdf
- https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/39099/EAMs_remarks_during_the_Inaugural_session_of_the_Conference_for_Women_Peacekeepers_from_the_Global_South__Women_in_Peacekeeping__A_Global_South_Perspe#:~:text=4.%E2%80%8B%20India%20has%20been,trail%20for%20others%20to%20follow.
- https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/39099/EAMs_remarks_during_the_Inaugural_session_of_the_Conference_for_Women_Peacekeepers_from_the_Global_South__Women_in_Peacekeeping__A_Global_South_Perspe#:~:text=4.%E2%80%8B%20India%20has%20been,trail%20for%20others%20to%20follow
- https://indembassy-amman.gov.in/pdf/25012024_India%20and%20UN_%20India's%20Contribution%20to%20UNPK%20Missions.doc.pdf
- https://pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1928025
- https://www.pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=147695
- https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2105783
- https://x.com/DefProdnIndia/status/1894062079566614714/photo/1
- https://pib.gov.in/PressReleseDetailm.aspx?PRID=2105749&reg=3&lang=1

Santosh Kumar / Ritu Kataria / Vatsla Srivastava